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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the Lafayette Parish Homebound Program (Louisiana) for students in grades K-12, with particular emphasis on the program's services for pregnant girls. Procedures for admitting students into the program, objectives for the pregnant girls (12-18 years old), and program components are considered. It is explained that the special class for pregnant girls operates as an alternative educational program to the regular school program. Accountability studies are noted to reveal that approximately 80% of the program participants completed their educations and were gainfully employed. (SBH)

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AN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM FOR PREGNANT SCHOOLGIRLS

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During 18 years of homebound teaching, many unique and amusing experiences have occurred. For example, being bitten by a goose, having 12 baby pigs climb into the car, and meeting a dog that only understood French. These 18 years have been enjoyable and rewarding. Homebound instruction can be easily incorporated into any school system. The primary presentation of this paper is the education of pregnant girls, but that program evolved from the homebound program and is still a part of homebound services.

The Lafayette Parish Homebound Program covers Grades K-12, and operates on a referral basis with the referral coming from the student's home school. A parent, teacher, counselor, doctor, etc., may make the initial request for a homebound referral. A student is eligible for home teaching if he or she is absent from or anticipates absences amounting to three consecutive weeks of school. The student is counted present daily in the home school while enrolled on the homebound program.

After the referral is received, the homebound coordinator contacts the physician to insure that the student is under a doctor's care, that the child should be out of school, and to determine if instruction is permissible. Then the teacher assigned to the student goes to the student's home school, contacts the classroom teachers and gets assignments for that particular student. A visit is made to the student's home, and the student and parent are made aware of certain procedures that must be followed.

These procedures include how the student should schedule his or her day and the fact that an adult must be in the home while the teacher is present. This is necessary because if something should happen to the student, the responsibility of the student's welfare would not fall totally on the teacher. Several students

have been rushed to the hospital - one choking on ice, one with severe abdominal pains, etc. The parent was there; but what a situation to be all alone, especially in this day and time of law suits.

One particular homebound student was a seven year old who was diagnosed as emotionally disturbed. This child was left alone to supervise 15 month old twins. The case was reported to the special education supervisor and the teacher didn't stay to teach until the parent understood that someone must be home.

Funny things happen in home teaching, and also sad things happen. Sometimes one becomes such a part of the family that no secrets are withheld, even though it is wished that maybe they were. Some things happen that can't be repeated here, but a teacher's education can be broadened in areas other than academic.

Homebound teaching in a bar proved to be a most unique experience. After repeatedly passing a bar while searching for a given address, it finally occurred to the teacher that this was, indeed, the place where she should stop. The 8:30 a.m. knock on the door was answered by a half-clad girl. After the teacher explained who she was, the girl said, "Wait, I'll get the kid's mother." As it turned out, there were two rooms behind the bar. The student lived with his family in one room and the bar waitresses slept in the second room. One of the regulations of the program is that the teacher and the student must be in the room alone. When this was explained to the mother, she said, "Well, you'll have to teach in the bar, that's the only private place at this time of day." The teacher and the student had a very successful year in the bar. He passed from 2nd to 3rd grade -- even with the brightly lit Schlitz beer clock turning around and around....

Once the student is referred to the Homebound Program and doctor's permission received, the home teacher visits 2 or 3 times a week until the student can return to school. Concept teaching is used for the home program. The teacher visits for about an hour. During this hour, assignments are graded, any necessary help or

tests given, and a new set of assignments written. Each student keeps an assignment book and all work covered on the program is written in this book. The idea of home teaching is not to give mountains of work or excessive testing but to try to give the students enough knowledge for them to comfortably fit back into their regular classroom. The home teaching situation is an unnatural situation and unnatural procedures should be followed if the best results are obtained. The physical setting is different, the physical well-being of a child is different, the relationship of the teacher to the number of pupils is different, the distractions are different, the requirements to follow routine are different, and the challenging stimuli are different.

The out of school teacher comes to a child with a definite procedure from which a plan can be formulated, tested, and changed if necessary. However, she should not come to the child with a plan into which he must fit. Plans will be different for a child with a room of his own than for a child who lives in a two room apartment with 4 people home all day. The home teacher teaches a child to make a schedule for out-of-school living. Such scheduling helps a child to become independent, self-directed and will permit creative learning. The teacher can quickly know exactly where and what a student does not understand.

When a homebound student is released by the doctor and returns to school, a letter is sent to the school stating the courses taken and the grades earned.

Pregnant girls have been taught in Lafayette Parish as homebound students since the early 1950's when Dr. Harley Smith was employed as Special Education Supervisor and devised the program. During the years, the program has experienced rejection, then acceptance. There were few pregnant girls receiving educational services in other areas of the state when the program began. Lafayette's program first started as a homebound program on a one-to-one basis in the girls' homes. This proved successful educationally and desirable in many respects resulting from

the one-to-one relationship and its effect on the total student in the total setting. There were, however, disadvantages to individualized teaching in the home. Since a girl was isolated and confined, she lost touch with her friends. Because she was not required to leave her surroundings for academic learning, many times she socially withdrew to a great degree.

In October, 1970, due to increasing numbers on the rolls, it became apparent that another solution to the education of these students should be sought. A self-contained class was established to make it possible to reach a larger number of students, while still continuing to meet their needs in the teaching hours provided. The class was successful from its indeption with the number of students increasing each year, in lieu of dropping out of school.

The school age pregnant girl faces many problems. She must change from an adolescent to an adult. She must function as a mother and perhaps as a wife, too. Her body undergoes great physical changes which are usually accompained by emotional stress and other problems. An education is a great necessity for a pregnant teenager, not only because she might have a child to support, but also because it is about the only normal thing in her life at this time. Her studies become exceedingly important. When it seems it might be denied her, she realizes, perhaps for the first time, that an education is a valued possession. Most pregnant girls are sincerely grateful for the opportunity to continue their education.

The class was organized to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To keep a girl abreast of her classmates, academically.
2. To remove the girl from educational isolation at home.
3. To help keep up morale during a crucial time.
4. To see that proper medical care is received during pregnancy; perhaps healthier babies will result.
5. To give proper nutrition and child care information.
6. To prevent school drop-outs that might possibly become welfare cases.

7. To continue the girl's education in hopes she will become a contributive member of society.

8. To provide a measure of self-respect needed, not only during this time period, but throughout her entire lifetime.

9. To provide teaching for a larger number of girls while utilizing fewer teachers.

The class was designed to accomplish educational goals but it was soon discovered that the girls needed assistance in coping with their overwhelming problems associated with the untimely pregnancy before they could function academically.

Many girls were not receiving medical care when they first entered the class. Some were seven or eight months pregnant at the time they enrolled. It was decided that medical care was more important than math and english, so a close liaison was established with Charity Hospital. There were problems here also, since many parents refused to sign the papers permitting Charity Hospital to care for their daughters. Meanwhile, the pregnancy progressed. This caused some frightening experiences. Occasionally, a girl would go into labor and deliver before the medical issue could be resolved. Charity Hospital would accept her for delivery, but it was always felt it would have been more beneficial if the girl had received pre-natal care even if it only amounted to a single doctor's visit before delivery.

It was quickly realized that these young girls, (ages 12 to 18), about to become mothers needed much more information than academic instruction. They were teenage girls, who thought and acted like other teenage girls, pregnant or not. They loved the junk food and did not realize that a diet of chips and cokes do not contribute to a healthy pregnancy. These observations led to the realization that nutrition must be incorporated into the program format.

Once or twice a year, girls were allowed to bring their babies to visit in the classroom. On these occasions, the teachers were aghast at the way the girls handled

their babies and tended to the infants' needs. One girl related how her two month old child refulsed to eat fried chicken. Another told how her one month old baby slept between her and her sister every night. The danger of this was explained. Suddenly, it seemed that child care was more important to this class than English and Math.

There is a high percentage of child abuse among teenage parents. They do not understand the child and they are angry that adult responsibility prevents them from performing like other teenagers. When their own mothers say, "I'm not keeping that baby for you to go to the dance; it's your baby," then the young parent slaps the child.

Last week, in newspaper society news from the Louisiana State Capitol, attention was called to the name of a ten year girl serving as a tea girl at a party. This particular name was of great interest because when she was three weeks old, her arms and legs were untied from the sides of her crib by the homebound teacher. Her teenage father had tied her because, he explained, she had been crying so much he was punishing her to make her stop. The young mother was in the corner of the room crying because she couldn't control him. She was a high school student scheduled for a lesson in her home that day. It was explained to the father that babies normally cry and they do not understand punishment. The child's name, being in the paper, was a gratifying sight because it meant she had survived having teenagers as parents.

Louisiana has a state law forbiding the teaching of sex education in the schools. Although this is a period of permissiveness in society with much exposure to sex related subjects in magazines and movies, it was found that the students, in special classes, were virtually ignorant of the reproductive and birth processes. Another instructional need beyond academics surfaced, the need for a professional nurse to answer their questions and explain what was happening (and had happened) to their bodies.

Because the special class teachers were aware of all these needs, they were trying to teach all of the academics, child growth and development, nutrition, labor and delivery. It was impossible to choose subjects of priority -- they were all essential -- but HELP was on the way! As a result of the close association with Charity Hospital, the teachers were invited to a consortium in New Orleans, sponsored by HEW.

The Division of Family Services, Public Health Units, gynecologists, Catholic Social Services, educators and others sent representatives to this consortium on teenage parenthood. The Director of Louisiana Health and Resources Administration issued a directive at the meeting that what is now known as the Division of Family Services, (The Louisiana Umbrella of Health and Helping Agencies), be responsible to see that committees concerned with teenage parents be formed in every parish throughout the state.

Our program is greatly indebted to the Lafayette Parish Division of Family Services for initiating the first meeting of agencies that were providing services to teenage parents. Some of these agencies were Lafayette Charity Hospital, The Public Health Unit, Division of Family Services, Lafayette Parish School Board, Family Planning, Catholic Social Services and others. The first meeting was very well attended and it was surprising how many different agencies touched the lives of these teenagers. Many of the agencies were unaware of the educational program offered even though the service was now about twenty years old. When the needs of the program were outlined, offers of help came forth quickly. The Division of Family Services offered to teach child growth and development one afternoon a week. The Parish Health Unit assigned two nurses to hold sessions on labor and delivery one afternoon a week. After this work started, the Home Economics Department of the local university, U.S.L., was approached and became part of the team in the area of nutrition. The teachers were able to relax now and resume their original roles, the teaching of academic subjects.

Contact with these service agencies on a regular basis has enabled the program to broaden to include speakers concerned with family planning, drug abuse, child abuse, etc. For example, the child growth and development instructor schedules a speaker from the Child Abuse Clinic and the nurse may bring someone in from family planning.

Three evaluation sessions were held each year with all agencies represented. Through these sessions, problems are solved and future plans are formulated. The meetings are held in the fall before school starts, in January to regroup the forces, if necessary, and in the spring for a final evaluation of the entire school year. The program has operated with the assistance of local and state agencies for the past three years. The girls in the program receive instruction and information that is invaluable to them and which is not available through the regular classroom in the public school system. Once, after the nurse took the girls to see the labor and delivery room in a local hospital, one girl was heard to remark, "Boy, if I had seen that before, I wouldn't be here now!"

A community volunteer comes once a week to teach creative crafts. Many girls have scheduled art or crafts as a part of their regular curriculum. This community volunteer makes it possible for them to meet scheduled requirements while at the same time enjoying social interaction. This group activity also affords them the acquisition of creative skills that will be useful to them for a lifetime.

A local senior citizens volunteer organization, RSVP, helps with home economics projects, primarily sewing. This service gives the girls one-to-one instruction that is so important when learning to sew.

The program offers a nursery on the campus. After the birth of the child, the young mother is often unable to return to her regular school, due to lack of child care. A nursery was established where students studying Vocational Child Care provide for the needs of the infants while their mothers attend school. The nursery is free of charge and young mothers, who are trying to complete their edu-

cations, have first preference. Children are cared for from one month to five years of age. A ninth grade girl can complete her education while her child is cared for in the nursery. Here, also, the Division of Family Services has proved to be a valuable ally. When a girl does not have transportation to the nursery, provided at school, the Family Service workers help to locate an acceptable day care center and provide financial assistance for this care.

The criterion for acceptance in the class is pregnancy. Most of the girls are unmarried. Generally, those who are married have done so as a result of the pressures of pregnancy. The present class enrollment is fifty (50). Approximately 25% are married.

FORMAT

The Lafayette Parish Special Class for Pregnant Girls operates as an alternative educational program to the regular school program. A girl may choose to attend the special class during her pregnancy or continue in her regular school. The special class operates under the Homebound Department, Special Education, and is taught by four (4) homebound teachers.

The special class meets three (3) days a week. The mornings are devoted to academics and the afternoons to other types of instruction, pertinent to the girls' needs. The girls are taught on an individual basis and maintain the same subjects they were taking in their home school.

The girls are referred to the program by their school counselor. When the girl enrolls in the special class, she is still counted present in her home school each day. This helps her to feel she is still a part of her regular school and all records go through her home school. There is no mention of the special class.

Each girl has an assignment pad where she writes the work she is supposed to complete between classes. The teacher helps the girl make a schedule to follow so

that routine and organization can be established. The girls receive any necessary explanation, instruction, and all testing during regular class sessions. Individual conferences are held during class sessions and all assignments checked.

The girls can ride the school bus to the special class and there is a hot lunch program at the school where the class is located.

Many community agencies participate and help to make the program successful. The Division of Family Services provides two workers, one afternoon each week, who teaches Child Growth and Development. This information is invaluable and necessary for these young mothers. Many have totally unrealistic expectations of their babies. The workers also bring in guest speakers who supply helpful information about services and benefits available. Last year, for example, representatives from Child Abuse, HELP, and Drug Abuse agencies spoke.

The Public Health Unit sends a nurse for an afternoon session on Wednesdays. The nurse informs the girls about the labor and delivery processes and also about their body changes during the pregnancy. Field trips are taken to the different community hospitals to acquaint the girls with the physical surroundings where their babies will be delivered. The nurse arranges guest speakers from community agencies, such as Family Planning and the local Health Unit. Literature and films are provided concerning prenatal and post-natal baby care. The nurse is available for individual counseling sessions. Many girls will not ask questions in a group situation, whereas, on an individual basis, they will voice confidences. The girls are made aware of many free programs that are available through the health unit. Some of these programs consist of the well-baby clinic, Crippled Children's Clinic, the WIC Program (Women, Infants and Children), and others. The nurse is a valuable asset.

The University of Southwestern Louisiana provides personnel from the Home Economics Department for sessions on nutrition. The personnel enlists university students

to help conduct these sessions and these students receive college credits for their work. The experience derived from these classes is beneficial for the university students as well as the special class students. Due to the teaching methods employed by the Home Economics students, the girls gain valuable information in an enjoyable manner. Their habits change from "french fries to fruit."

The University found their participation with the class of such value, that they submitted an article concerning their contribution for publication to the Journal of Nutritional Education, published by the National Society of Nutritional Education. This endeavor reinforces the beneficial theory of community interaction.

After "Maslow's heirachy of needs" was satisfied, more asthetic needs were desired. A community volunteer was enlisted to teach arts and crafts. This was considered to be a skill useful now and through their entire lives.

One thing led to another and it was discovered that a local senior citizens volunteer association might be called upon to aide in other areas. The expertise and experience in the areas of sewing and child rearing might be an additonal community resource to be utilized.

After a girl delivers, and her doctor releases her when her baby is approximately six weeks old, she returns to her regular school. This is sometimes a problem due to lack of child care. To help solve this problem, a nursery was established on the campus and is now in its fourth year of operation. The nursery is staffed by girls from the local high schools. These girls are enrolled in a Vocational Child Care course. There is a one-to-one relationship in the nursery and children are cared for from the ages of one month to five years. A ninth grade girl can finish her education while her child makes developmental progress for four years in the nursery.

The possibilities for growth in innovative programs are unlimited. Growth is based on cooperation between community agencies and the educational system. Resources are available. Investigation into these resources will yield help where

help is needed!!!

RESEARCH

In 1971 and 1973, accountability studies were done for the purpose of assessing certain accomplishments of the program, such as, job maintenance and years of education completed. One study was published in Louisiana Schools, a journal of the Louisiana Teachers' Association. Research was accomplished through detailed questionnaires sent to students participating in the program since its inception. This research revealed that approximately 80% of the program participants completed their educations and were gainfully employed.[1]

ORIGINAL QUOTES

Case A

"Whenever a student is confined to the home -- whether it be from pregnancy or a serious accident, they need to further their education, whatever the case may be. We live in an age where education is not only important but absolutely necessary to keep up with our changing world. If at all possible, do not deny this opportunity to anyone. The student will eventually get over the pregnancy or illness, but the scar of improper education will stay with them all through their life."[2]

Case B

"To be pregnant, unmarried and only 17 is a great emotional trauma; and if such situations are not dealt with properly, it will be a scar one will never forget. At the time, I was so ashamed and depressed, that I just didn't care."[3]

Case C

"In evaluating the class, I think that the idea of having the girls meet together in a classroom is worthwhile to us because we can discuss our health questions concerning our pregnancies and learn from each other. The individual method teaching is great because it enables us to be more independent and do more for ourselves. The class itself is more interesting because the students are actually the

ones working. The teachers are there to assist the students to understand and see that we progress."[4]

Case D

"I liked the class because in my case I couldn't go out and see people. Here at school there are other girls you can talk to and you realize that you aren't the only one. It makes you feel good to talk to other people about it."[5]

FOOTNOTES

1 John Thornton, Ph.D. and Pat Link, "An Evaluation of the Educational Program for Pregnant Girls in Lafayette Parish," Louisiana Schools, April, 1972, p 27.

2 Statement made on a questionnaire sent to Case A for research purposes.

3 Ibid

4 Ibid

5 Ibid